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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.10 a.m. in St. Peter's Square, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian the Pope focused on the theme "Saints, witnesses and companions of hope" (cf. *Heb* 11: 40- 12: 2a).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present.

The General Audience concluded with the recital of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

On the day of our Baptism, the invocation of the saints resonated for us. Many of us in that moment were babies, held in the arms of our parents. Shortly before the anointment with the Oil of the catechumens, symbol of the strength of God in the fight against evil, the priest invited the entire assembly to pray for those who were about to receive Baptism, invoking the intercession of the saints. That was the first in time which, during our life, we were given this company of "older" brothers and sisters . the saints – who passed along the same way as us, who

knew the same hardships and live for ever in God's embrace. The Letter to the Hebrews defines this company that surrounds us with the expression "*cloud of witnesses*" (12: 1). This is what the saints are: a cloud of witnesses.

Christians, in their battle against evil, do not despair. Christianity cultivates *an incurable trust*: it does not believe that the negative and disruptive forces can prevail. The final word on the history of man is not hatred, nor is it evil, nor death, nor war. In every moment of life the hand of God assists us, and also the discreet presence of all the believers "who have gone before us with the sign of faith" (Roman Canon). Their existence tells us, first and foremost, that Christian life is not an unattainable ideal. And together it comforts us: we are not alone, the Church is made up of innumerable brothers, often anonymous, who have gone before us and who, by the action of the Holy Spirit, are involved in the events of those who still live down here.

That of Baptism is not the only invocation of the saints that marks the path of Christian life. When an engaged couple consecrate their love in the sacrament of Marriage, the intercession of the saints is again invoked for them, this time as a couple. And this invocation is a source of trust for the two young people who set out on the "journey" of conjugal life. Those who love truly have the desire and the courage to say "for ever" – "for ever" – but they know that they need the grace of Christ and the help of the saints to be able to live married life for ever. Not like some, who say "while love lasts". No: for ever! Otherwise it is best not to marry. Either for ever, or nothing. Therefore, in the nuptial liturgy the presence of the saints is invoked. And in difficult moments it is necessary to have the courage to lift one's eyes to heaven, thinking of the many Christians who have passed through tribulations, and have kept their baptismal robes white, washing them in the blood of the Lamb (cf. *Rev 7: 14*); thus the Book of Revelation tells us. God never abandons us: every time that we are in need, one of His angels comes to lift us up and console us. "Angels" sometimes with a human face and heart, because God's saints are always here, concealed in our midst. This is difficult to understand and even to imagine, but the saints are present in our life. And when someone invokes a saint, it is precisely because he is close to us.

The priests too conserve the memory of an invocation of the saints pronounced for them. It is one of the most touching moments of the liturgy of ordination. The candidates lie on the ground, facing the floor. And all the assembly, guided by the bishop, invokes the intercession of the saints. A man would be crushed by the weight of the mission entrusted to him, but feeling that all paradise is behind him, that God's grace will not be missing because Jesus is always faithful, and so he can set out serene and heartened. We are not alone.

And what are we? We are dust that aspires to heaven. Our forces are weak, but powerful is the mystery of the grace that is present in the life of Christians. We are faithful to this land, that Jesus loved in every instant of His life, but we know and want to hope in the transfiguration of the world, in its definitive fulfilment where finally there will no longer be tears, evil and suffering.

May the Lord give to all of us *the hope of being saints*. But some of you might ask me, "Father, can one be a saint every day of one's life?" Yes, you can. "But this means we have to pray all day?" No, it means that you must do your duty all day: to pray, to go to work, to look after your children. But it is necessary to do everything with a heart open to God, and in this way one can become a saint. May the Lord give us the hope of being saints. Let us not think that it is a difficult thing, that it is easier to be delinquents than saints! No. We can be saints because the Lord helps us: it is He Who helps.

It is the great gift that each one of us can give to the world. May the Lord give us the grace to believe so profoundly in Him as to become an image of Christ for this world. Our history is in need of "mystics", of people who refuse any rule, who aspire to charity and fraternity. Men and women who live also accepting a portion of suffering, because they take on the hardship of others. But without these men and women the world would not have hope. For this, I hope for you – and I hope also for me – that the Lord give us the hope of being saints.

Thank you!

Greetings in various languages

French

I am happy to greet French-speaking pilgrims and faithful from France and Switzerland. By the intercession of all the saints, may the Lord grant us the grace of believing deeply in Him so as to become an *image of Christ* for this world! May the company of saints help us to recognize that God never abandons us, to bear witness to hope on this earth. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly the groups from Scotland, Greece, Hong Kong, Indonesia, the Philippines and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

German

I address a cordial greeting to pilgrims from German-speaking countries. The Lord invites His people to be holy, just as He is holy (cf. *Lev 19: 2*). Let us wish to accept this invitation promptly, placing ourselves in the service of each other in a concrete way in everyday life. May the Holy Spirit guide you on your path.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, especially the groups from Spain and Latin America. May the Lord grant us the grace of being saints, of converting into images of Christ for this world, so in need of hope, and of people who rejecting evil, aspire to charity and fraternity. God bless you.

Portuguese

I address a warm greeting to all Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, especially the faithful of Jundiaí, São Carlos and Santo André. Dear friends, the world is in need of saints and all of us, without exception, are called to holiness. Let us not be afraid! With the help of those who are already in heaven, let us allow ourselves to be transformed by the merciful grace of God, Who is more powerful than any sin. God bless you always.

Arabic

I address a cordial greeting to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular those from the Middle East! Dear brothers and sisters, the saints are people who, before reaching the glory of heaven, lived a normal life, with joys and pains, hardships and hopes; but when they knew God's love, they followed Him with all their heart. They give us a message, and they say to us, "trust in the Lord, because the Lord never lets us down! He is a good friend, always by our side", and with their witness they encourage us not to be afraid of going against the grain. May the Lord bless you.

Polish

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims. Dear brothers and sisters, on our path of faith, especially in difficult moments, we must have the courage to lift our eyes to heaven, thinking of the saints who, on earth, lived their everyday joys and tribulations together with Christ, and now live with Him in the glory of the heavenly Father. They are witnesses of hope for us: they give us an example of Christian life and support us in our aspiration to holiness. May their intercession accompany you always. I give you my heartfelt blessing. Jesus Christ be praised!

Italian

I address a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking faithful.

I am pleased to welcome the deacons of the Pontifical Urban College of Propaganda Fide; the Clarissian Franciscan missionaries of the Most Holy Sacrament and the Scheut missionaries on the occasion of their respective General Chapters: I urge each one of you to live the mission with eyes attentive to human and existential peripheries. I greet the group of mayors and administrators of Logudoro, accompanied by the bishop of Ozieri, Msgr. Corrado Melis, and those of the Association *Citt' del Santissimo Crocifisso*, hoping that they may carry out a generous service to the common good. I greet the Forestry and Environmental Protection Command of the Carabinieri, as well as the *Amore e Libertà* Community, which I encourage to support for the efforts in promoting the education of young people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

On the occasion of the World Refugee Day, which the international community celebrated yesterday, last Monday I wanted to meet with a representation of refugees hosted by parishes and Roman religious institutes. I would like to take this opportunity offered by yesterday's World Refugee Day to express my sincere appreciation for the campaign for the new migration law: "I was a stranger – humanity that does good", which enjoys the official support of Italian *Caritas*, the Migrantes Foundation and other Catholic organizations.

I offer a special thought for young people, the sick, and newlyweds. Next Friday, the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, is the day when the Church supports all priests with prayers and affection. Dear young people, draw from the Heart of Jesus the nourishment for your spiritual life and the source of your hope; dear people who are sick, offer your sufferings to the Lord, so that He may pour His love into the hearts of men; and you, dear newlyweds, partake of the Eucharist, so that, nourished by Christ, you may be Christian families touched by the love of that divine Heart.
